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ABSTRACT

A comprehensive bibliography of publications on the subject of death education is presented. Listed items represent only those published over the past 8 years. The listing is divided into articles and books which have focused on various dimensions of dying and death and those which deal exclusively with suicide and life-threatening behavior. Only entries which have addressed issues pertinent to children and young adults have been included. Publications include general articles, books, and book chapters. (JD)

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UPDATING DEATH EDUCATION FOR CHILDREN AND ADOLESCENTS: THE LITERATURE CONNECTION

by

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UPDATING DEATH EDUCATION FOR CHILDREN AND ADOLESCENTS: THE LITERATURE CONNECTION

Considerable literature emanated in the latter part of the 1970's and early 1980's relative to the need for death education for children, adolescents, and older adults. Mixed with this literature were several pieces that focused on curriculum and methodology. While fewer articles are currently being published in health education periodicals, the overall publication of death-related literature has continued unabated by academics representing multidisciplinary fields. In fact, the contemporary literature has matured in character, contains more substance, and is more practice and/or research oriented compared with the earlier literature.

In the seventies, various reports urged health educators and other teachers of children to strengthen their knowledge base and pedagogical skills in death education and death-related counseling in order to be competent teachers and counselors of young people. While it is difficult to determine the extent and success of these efforts, perhaps it is safe to assume that many teachers have incorporated strategies designed to promote relevant death-related concepts within the classroom. Certainly the demand for effective death education has not changed.

The need for education about dying and death has never been greater due in part to the continuing incidence of cancer and the increase in AIDS, adolescent suicide, homicide, horrendous-type deaths (i.e., random murder of school children in classrooms and playgrounds), catastrophic events

such as the shuttle explosion, airplane crashes, and major school bus accidents. Additionally, the continuing possibility of nuclear annihilation is a factor of great concern among many older children and young adults. Unfortunately, the "death movement" has brought some incompetents and charlatans out of the closet allowing them to become involved in the miseducation of children. For example, the February 1988 issue of The Atlantic, in an article titled "Mortal Fears," presented various instances of this miseducation within our nation's schools in the name of death education. Some media people focused on these atrocities and presented editorials questioning the validity of death education. In response to this issue the Association for Death Education and Counseling (ADEC), a professional organization comprised of multidisciplinary-based academics and lay persons, has formed a task force of educators to study and analyze the issue. This task force will attempt to (1) determine the status of death education within our nation's schools, (2) develop guidelines and make recommendations relative to the ideal K-12 curriculuIm, and (3) make recommendations of minimal knowledge, skills and attitudes teachers should possess before attempting to deal with any form of death education.

What can health educators do to better qualify themselves for teaching dimensions of death education and/or responding to death-related experiences that occur and affect young students? There are still minimal opportunities available for the purpose of developing appropriate knowledge and skills. However, for those interested ADEC now offers a certification process for teachers and counselors who demonstrate

competence in the subject matter. In preparation for this process, ADEC also sponsors a three-course sequence designed and taught by competent, certificated professionals. In addition, death education courses continue to be offered as regular components of undergraduate and graduate curricula among major colleges and universities throughout the country. Some, i.e., New York University and the University of Florida, offer master's degrees in thanatological studies. Legitimate death education courses currently provide the best available vehicle for gaining knowledge about the field.

In addition to these formal opportunities, the professional literature, replete with philosophic, experiential, and research-based information, is abundant. Consequently, a comprehensive and carefully selected bibliography is presented for the use of inquiring teachers desirous of additional information. Bibliographical items represent only those published over the past eight years. The listing is divided into articles and books which have focused on various dimensions of dying and death and those which deal exclusively with suicide and life-threatening behavior. Only entries which have addressed issues pertinent to children and young adults have been included.

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